Eugene Stickland

Senior Stories YYC Interview

⏰Sun, 11/17/24 11 AM

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Audio Link
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INTRO

Welcome to Senior Stories YYC, brought to you by Global Shapers Calgary. I'm Emma, part of a group of Calgarians under 30 who are passionate about creating meaningful change in our community.

This interview is all about connecting generations. We're sitting down with amazing Calgarians who are 65 and older to hear their stories, learn from their experiences, and bridge the gap between younger and older perspectives. We'll explore how they've made an impact, the legacies they're building, and how Calgary has shaped their journeys. We hope these stories inspire Calgarians of all ages to come together to further the good work that's been done over decades past.

Today, we welcome Eugene Stickland, a captivating storyteller, writer, mentor, and internationally-successful playwright. With authenticity, humility, and a sly sense of humour, he will teach you what it means to live and breathe as an artist in Calgary.

**apologies for the timestamp inaccuracy as a result of this intro!

TRIGGER WARNING FOR SUICIDE.
22:45 - 26:20 is the updated timestamp for what might be a triggering section on suicide. It is also mentioned earlier in brief reference to a project.

Emma Berger 00:00
If you'd like to just start off with a bit of an introduction about, you know, your background, your career, whatever, your story, I guess as it pertains to Calgary or, um, I'll just let you do your introduction as you see fit.

Eugene Stickland 00:15
Yeah, okay. Well, first of all, my name is Eugene Stickland. There's no R in my last name. Pointed Stick-land. I was born in Regina, Saskatchewan in 1956. That makes me 68 years old. I started off as a music major in university, and that was going okay. I'm not sure it was really going to be my career, but I ended up getting a scholarship to study in Germany for a year, and that sort of put an end to my music because I didn't have a piano there studying. I wasn't studying music. So when I came back to Regina, I got interested in writing. I thought – I'd always had been – so I decided I should make myself a writer and study English. I did that.

I was fortunate enough, or I think it was fortunate, to have a play done when I was still in probably fourth year university, and that gave me the bug for the theater. So when I finished my BA, I looked around for master's programs, and there was one at York University in Toronto, which was an ensemble of people from around Canada that included actors, directors, writers, and so I was lucky enough to be chosen as one of the writers for that from around the country. So I went to Toronto and studied playwriting, got my MFA in theater, wrote several plays in Toronto for a small company I was involved with in the 80s.

I moved back to Regina briefly, didn't work out, and I got a play in development at Alberta Theatre Projects in Calgary. On the strength of that, I moved my small family to Calgary in 1994. Fortunately for me, that first play I wrote for them was a really big hit, and I don't use that word lightly. It ended up having over a hundred productions around Canada and in translation in French and Quebec.

It became my calling card, I guess, and as a result of that, I became the playwright in residence at Alberta Theatre Projects (ATP) for ten years. It was really a one-year contract that got renewed ten times. During that time, I wrote ten plays, which is pretty much unheard of, that were all produced – I probably wrote about twelve, a couple that never saw the light of day after that.

And while I was at, speaking of development of the next generation, part of that, my residency included mentoring high school students from around Calgary in a program called Student Writers Group. So for ten years, I would meet on Saturday morning with maybe ten or twelve high school students from around Calgary, and we would work together on a new play of theirs.

It was an amazing program in that I had so many enthusiastic, talented people come into it. And now, that was so long ago, I'm seeing them take their – some of them – take their place in the Calgary Theatre community. One fellow who I mentored and taught, I guess, when he was 14, is now sort of a senior statesman in the Calgary Theatre seat.

He's got gray hair, he's got grown children, and boy does that make me feel old. And there's several like him. And in an all-state Calgary, some went on to Toronto and other places, but I think if I'm thinking of my legacy, on one hand I have got the plays and a body of work that I created that I'm very proud of. But even more so, I think the people who I was able to influence in that program and in other programs that I worked on, that's really the most important thing for me as I look back and I see them functioning. I'm not sure if I bless them or curse them through life in the theatre, but they seem to be enjoying themselves and yeah, I'm very proud of them.

So after the 10 years at Alberta Theatre Projects (ATP), I was given a weekly column in the Calgary Herald, it's a feature column. I could write whatever I wanted and I did that for about six years. It was basically arts-related, it was in the entertainment section, so it was meant to be arts-related, but I was never told what to write about.

And so I would give a kind of an offbeat perspective of how I was viewing life in Calgary. And from that, I heard several times people refer to me as the “conscience of the city,” which I love that definition or that label, because it was meant to be about, in a city where, let's face it, a lot of people come to Calgary not to consume art or produce art, but they come to make money, right.

So Calgary gets the reputation of being a very soulless place. And it's not true if you dig a little deeper. There's a lot of people in this city who make it an amazing art city. The support is, if you look, well, you can look at the library that we’re in right now, but this doesn't just happen. It's one of the most significant buildings in the last 50 years.

And this is just, if you look, if you go down the street here to Arts Commons, which is an amazing facility, and that's where I was lucky enough to work at, the Martha Cullen Theater, Arts Commons. I was still living in Regina and I came here and I was working on a play. And they gave me tickets to see a play in the Martha Cullen Theater.

And it wasn't a very good play, but I remember sitting in that theater looking around and saying to myself, I'm going to have my work done here someday. Now, I wish I could say I'm going to make a million dollars someday because I've never been able to do that. But it was true. I went on and I had nine plays produced in that space. Well, six plays and three of them twice. So that's nine productions.

An incredibly beautiful theater. We also have the Vertigo Complex, we’ve got the Grand. There's so many. Studio Bell, the music center is right next door. You can't fault the generosity of prominent Calgarians to create these spaces. And what's needed, I think, more now is some kind of mentorship program that will fill those spaces with our talented next generation.

And I worry when I see, like at Mount Royal, they've canceled the theater program, the performative music programs. I know that it gets whittled down every year at the U of C and the training is lacking at the university level, surely. That's a problem that's endemic with universities everywhere as they become more and more run on a business model, which a university was never meant to be that. The university was meant to be a place where you could learn and without the pressure of the real world on you. And you could try new ideas and you could fail and you could fail safely. And if you're going to apply the business model to a university, it's a recipe for failure. It's not going to work.

So if I had a wish for Calgary, it would be to invest more in this next generation, like you guys, and back off on the buildings. We've got lots of pretty buildings, but we need intelligent, well-trained people to inhabit them now.

As a result of the Herald, I mean, I've talked to a lot of young people about journalism, even though I didn't consider myself a journalist. But my career at the Herald ended really at the time that newspapers ended, effectively. When I wrote in the Herald, the Saturday edition might be

80 or 90 pages, and now it's about eight pages. People would buy that weekend paper, and I had so many sort of middle-aged women who would joke that they spent their Saturday morning in bed with me because I was in the paper.

They would get a coffee and read that paper all morning, and that doesn't exist anymore. I didn't know what to tell people who wanted to be journalists other than don't, or don't look for a career of writing for a paper, it's probably not going to happen. So I think journalism programs have become more about creating social media programs and platforms and doing all that stuff.

Just in terms of mentoring the next generation, when I was writing for the Herald, a woman who was running a program for Aboriginal adolescent girls approached me in Cafe Beano one day about coming in and teaching a poetry workshop to them. Now I had taught at what is now the First Nations University in Regina before I came to Calgary.

I also grew up in the north end of Regina, which is pretty much populated with First Nations people. It hasn't always been an easy mix over there, it's been a lot of problems.

But I was used to working or just being with First Nations people, so I happily went and taught a poetry workshop where I don't know if I taught it, but I just introduced these 25 girls who were from 10 to 17, I guess, about poetry and about writing, how you go about doing it. We had a lot of fun.

And then the next year, I think that was 2012, and then the next year, the director wanted to address the issue of youth suicide in First Nations communities and asked me to help her write a stage presentation about it. And that was a very odd experience because I suddenly found myself talking to 11-year-olds about suicide.

12:33
It was very – it was very hard on *me*, actually, I'm not trained as a social worker or anything like that. And we did get a script and we did it for 400 policy makers and deputy ministers, program directors for youth programs and First Nation programs in Alberta. We did it in Edmonton, we lucked out, we had 25 girls on stage. Nobody knew what they were doing, but somehow the gods smiled upon us and we got it done.

And thousands of people saw it on a webinar format as well. When we came back, I was thinking, oh boy, we were so lucky to get away with that, right? And the director had arranged a bunch of subsequent productions in our performances in Calgary. And then the great floods of 2013 happened and it was never done again. Thank the Lord because we were lucky the first time we got away with it, but we could have so easily fallen on our face.

So the next year I rewrote it for three girls only. You know, it's just even with the 25 or 26 girls just getting them all to show up on any given night was virtually impossible and if you've got a role assigned to somebody who doesn't show up then you've got a lot of scrambling to do and

you know, these girls have a lot going on in their lives that the fact that they show up at all is something of a miracle but to expect all of them would be some kind of fantasy.

So we got it down to three and myself, I acted as a narrator, and we took this – it was quite amazing. We did this little presentation like won't call it a play is more of a performance piece, I guess into like rotary clubs and Presbyterian churches and stuff and I couldn't believe it because it was like by this time about 2015/2016, we were presenting to white people who had never been in the presence of a native person in their lives and they're like 70. And I wondered how how is it possible?

And and so because of those that situation those reactions I became totally committed that there had to be some kind of change in our in our culture at least to be aware and then of course after that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission came up and we wrote a play based on that and then the status of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) came up and we wrote a reaction to that. That one we wrote as a stage play. I wrote it with the girls over it would have been the early winter of 2020 and we were scheduled to do that as part of a fundraiser because the funding for this program I was working with was always precarious and never guaranteed. As it was so we were supposed to present this as part of a fundraiser in May and the funds generated would help keep the program going for the next year. Obviously by February there was rumors of the pandemic then by March the theaters were closing.

So I called the director. She was a personal friend and I said we're not going to be doing a stage play, we've got to figure out a different way to do that. And I guess because I feel confident writing in different media I said I can rewrite it as a video film script and we did that and the way I wrote it, it was just one at a time. Just one girl at a time.

And so using all the protocols that were in place, maybe you can remember them. They were – it seems like a lifetime ago, doesn't it? But you know, even for us to be in a room like this would have been probably impossible. But we somehow managed to shoot it and then the director entered it in all these different film festivals and we started to win awards for short film; I think we won five or seven around North America. So it was an incredible success and that was probably the high point of my my time with with them and the program just disbanded last year but it was again something I'm very proud of. And I was always encouraging these the girls in the program to take seriously the opportunity to go into the arts or to go into English literature. From my experience at the First Nations University in Regina, I know that their bands will pay for their education if they qualify and also the world is ready to hear Indigenous voices now and in particular female Indigenous voices, so you know, I kept saying to them the time is right. 20 years ago it wouldn't have been but now it is so go for it.

So a few of them have grabbed on to that idea and I think they're going to end up going to university into film studies, probably. That's always more attractive than theater. So good luck to them. I'm gonna add again, I'd be very proud if they take their place in the artistic community if I had any small part in it, I'd be very happy about that.

Above and beyond that the whole time I've been in Calgary I've taught. I was at Mount Royal the other day. I taught a playwriting course at Extension at Mount Royal. I was the writer in residence for about seven years at St. Mary's University in Fish Creek. And I taught playwriting and prose writing at that place and taught contemporary drama class.

So I've always had students. Lately I've been teaching playwriting at the company of Rogue's Acting Studios because they did a play of mine and we had such a good time we thought, well, wouldn't it be interesting to teach playwriting essentially to actors, people interested in acting? So we have five or six people every year who are curious about how you go about writing your own play, so I've been teaching there very much part time, just one session a year, a small session. So keeping my hand in finding people who want to learn this arcane art form of playwriting. It's a difficult art form and there's a really long gestation period for playwrights typically. You don't just learn it in a day. So it's a slow process, but there's still people interested in that, thank God.

Emma Berger 19:49
Yeah.

Eugene Stickland 19:49
So that's kind of where I'm at, does that answer your question?

Emma Berger 19:53
Oh, that answers like all of them.

Eugene Stickland 19:56
All of them. Well, I can talk about specifics if you like.

Emma Berger 19:59
Yeah, there's so much to pull from what you said. I think I've so far taken away a lot of value in terms of, it seems that what you've done has kind of been influenced by big events. I mean, how can it not be? If something gets canceled due to a flood or COVID, you just kind of have to go with the flow.

But I always find that fascinating in terms of how … incidents or just something comes up and it just kind of changes how you have to cope and work with the skills that you have.

And you mentioned, of course, doing the sort of plays or films, what they turned into with the Indigenous women and like handling a topic like suicide that you weren't exactly comfortable doing. And just you decided, I imagine it was, your motivation was probably that it's important and worth doing, even if you're not, you don't have exactly the background that you'd like.

So yeah, if you could talk more about that, I guess.

Eugene Stickland 21:01
Well, with the suicide project, I quickly realized... I've always had a philosophy, I've always had it, which comes from the Hippocratic oath that doctors have to take, that when I'm teaching any kind of class, I'll do no harm.

So if you come to me because you're interested in poetry, I might not teach you anything about poetry, but at least at the end of 12 weeks you'll be just as enthusiastic about poetry as you were when we started, and I'm not going to try to destroy anybody's love for any of these activities.

In a way, I don't believe that you can teach poetry or teach playwriting or anything, I believe that you can only allow people, give them permission to say, okay, I'm really going to try this, and then see where they go with it, and then give them encouragement and a little bit of direction, but I can't pronounce that this is how you do it, right? If anyone tells you they can, I think they're lying to you.

SUICIDE PROJECT BREAKS DOWN INTO MORE DETAIL (NEW TIMESTAMP: 22:45)

So with the suicide project, that “do no harm,” it got to be a bigger issue as I didn't want to harm anybody emotionally if the discussion became too deep, too heavy for even me as an older person and more used to death and having things happen in my life, but you look at an 11 or 12 year old, you *hope* that they have a kind of an innocence and I didn't want to tread upon that.

Now, unfortunately, what you learn – what I learned from working, well, I can give you an example. When we were working on the revision of it for a smaller cast, we were working with three girls, and just one night we were, there's a little lull in the conversation, and she just started to talk, and she said – I think she was 14, okay –

[Eugene has shared this girl’s story with suicide but we have removed it from the audio].

and that night, or the next week before we met again, I wrote it, I wrote that little story, pretty much the way she told it, so it wasn't like I had to, I mean, it's what we were talking about, I didn't have to say, come on, you must know a story, I didn't have to do that at all. And what was alarming to me, when I would just hear the girls in the first time around, when we were doing it, I was just sitting there, and they were all, I gave them a little writing thing to do, and I overheard two of them said, have you ever tried? And one said, yeah, I tried, but [redacted] and so they talked about that in a way that you might talk about, do you like Chinese food or something, you know, it was so detached and unemotional. And then the next thing that the one girl, who was talking to the one who said she had tried, she said, oh I'm going to dye my hair Friday night, do you want to come over, and she goes, yeah. So they just switched from suicide to, to dyeing their hair, like sort of equally weighted, you know. So it was, I didn't really have to, I don't think,

cause anybody any trauma, other than just that was what they called the elephant in the room, that's what we were talking about, right, so there was no avoiding it, you know.

One thing I'm not sure if this has, it will help you guys, but when we wrote it and produced it, Helen, the director, and I thought, oh, this is going to get everybody's attention, now we'll see some change, now we'll see some money put into programs for preventing this, and nothing changed. That was like 10 years ago, and I think the situation is just as bad as it ever was. So sometimes in art, you know, you think, “wow, we're doing amazing things and we're going to change the world.” And then you look up and you go, the world didn't change, you know.

Emma Berger:
It's kind of tragic to think about it like that, but it is really a wake-up call, I think.

26:20 is the NEW TIMESTAMP WHERE any discussion of suicide ends

Emma Berger 25:38: Art is obviously a very influential medium or it can be if people are open to being influenced, I suppose.

Eugene Stickland
You know, I wrote a play called Sitting on Paradise, and it's sort of, it's for Alberta Theatre Projects, and it's about materialism, I guess. It's a very, very wealthy Calgary couple, and the wife of the couple is being encouraged to divest herself of some of her material possessions, in particular a couch.

It's a comedy, and it's a question that I've always been interested in is this relationship between materialism and spirituality. That's just a personal interest that I have, and that was a play I was able to explore it in. Okay, fine. We did the play. We were sitting at the Auburn Saloon, which was the theatre bar, and it was after the opening night, and the show was tremendously well received.

It became a hit, another hit, two in a row, that was amazing. And a woman came up to me, someone I didn't know, and on the opening night, she said, “Eugene, can I talk to you for a second,” and I said, “yeah.” She said, “okay, I saw the preview the other night, and I came back tonight just to see it again.” I said, “uh-huh,” and she goes, “after the preview, I went home.” She said, “I've just been through a really lousy divorce. It was really tough. It was just as bad as a divorce can get, and I got the house.” She said, “and I was so happy. I said to myself, yes, now I've got the house.” And she said, “after I saw you play, I went home, and I went into the house, and I thought, this isn't any kind of prize. This is a trap.”

And she said she went at like 10 o'clock at night or whatever. She went down to her basement and started packing up all her stuff because she knew she had to get out. And she thanked me. And I thought, wow, that's the last thing I expected anyone – that kind of decisive action that

someone might change their life because they saw a play of mine. But I saw it happen once.

Maybe it happened more times than I knew, right?

Jaime: Oh yeah, no kidding.

Eugene Stickland 28:10: Yeah, it made me very proud that moment as well to think, what good is this empty house? You've got no family left? You've got no partner? It's just…

Emma Berger 28:18
Yeah, yeah, it's like, you can definitely change people just from, I mean, I found recently from being yourself, I mean, a few people have told me, I guess, that I had an influence when I didn't expect that I would have had an influence, so I just find, yeah, like, if you are pursuing your passion and doing something of meaning that you can connect with other people who are looking for that kind of connection, I think. That's kind of beautiful.

Eugene Stickland
Yeah. It really can be.

Emma Berger 28:43
So I guess I'm wondering how can this sort of, this bringing up meaning and shifting ideas in people, how can that be further facilitated by, I guess, other people looking to create change, like how can, like specifically with young people, I guess, how would you expect, I don't know, maybe people who are not playwrights and not, you know, experts in a field, per se, to, yeah to kind of continue inspiring other people.

Eugene Stickland 29:17
Well, I think you hit on it, by being yourself you give a different version of how a life can be lived. So, for instance, if you're not a materialist in a materialistic city like Calgary, and yet you're thought to be successful, then you do present an alternative to a certain way of living and to certain aspirations that people may have that may not be at their heart, it may be just in their mind that this is a good thing to do. So they go to law school instead of to art college, right? And how often does that happen? Every day, I'll tell you.

Yeah, I had an interesting moment at the beginning of the pandemic. I was going to my coffee shop, and it's in a pretty prominent neighborhood. Well, it's on the cusp. It's very prominent up in Mount Royal, but it's not so prominent down the beltline where I live. So you get an interesting mixture of people. And there was a couple there, and we were all on those stupid little orange dots, like distanced a meter apart, waiting to go in. That kind of tension was in the air. It was sort of winter-ish.

And this couple is there, and she's saying to him, “say something to him, say something to him,” and I'm just standing there. And then he goes, “Hi, Eugene.” I said hi. “You don't know us, but

we know who you are." I said, "Oh, nice." And she says, "My husband is a lawyer. But his practice, this office kind of basically shut down at the beginning of the pandemic.

He's about 40, and he said, 'Now I can finally write that novel I always wanted to write.' And then he looked at me and said, 'But I couldn't. I didn't know how to start.' And he said, 'I'm a smart person. I've been thinking of this novel for years. I read all the time. And he said, what am I doing? What am I doing wrong?'" I said, "You became a lawyer. That's what you do. Be happy with that. There's so many rewards, but you didn't become a novelist because you can't just switch gears when you're 40 and say, okay, now I'm a novelist because you've never, you didn't train your mind that way."

And I think that this is a false assumption a lot of people have in a place like Calgary, that it's a hobby. Oh, so-and-so plays the piano really well. Well, great. But. Do they play well enough that they're going to influence the next generation of piano players? Probably not, if they're just playing a Beethoven sonata in their basement, right?

I went and saw the E Street Band, Bruce Springsteen, last night. That band has been together for 50 years. That was the most amazing concert I've ever seen. And it didn't just happen. It's 50 years of those people playing together. Now, they have a guy who writes hit after hit after hit. I mean, it's just like the greatest hit. But you need to train your mind and you need to train your soul in the arts. If it's only going to be like a hobby or if it's only going to be something that you did because you failed at something else, it's not going to go anywhere.

But the only way that that could happen is if it's somehow honored, right? It may not be honored financially. How many of us in the arts have worked as waiters, worked in shitty jobs, pardon my language, worked in lousy jobs, done things that we really don't want to do, but I always tell my students, that's okay. That's better than finding something that you really love doing because then you'll end up doing that.

I've had so many people say they're going to go into education. And I say, okay, but you're not going to be an artist anymore. You're going to be someone who teaches artists, but there's a difference, right? And if you really love it, you could have a great life. You'll at least have a steady paycheck. You can buy a nice house. You can buy a car, all those things. Nothing wrong with it.

We need good teachers. But if your heart is really telling you to write poetry, I'd say you should go work in a coffee shop because you're not going to love it.

Emma Berger
And then it'll like, encourage you to do the thing that you actually love, right.

Eugene Stickland
That's right. It's not going to steal your soul away from it, right? Yeah, but that's, I don't like to

say that because it's a tough life. Don't kid yourself. We romanticize poverty and we romanticize a lack of stability, I guess, that, oh, you have to live by your wits, you have to go day by day, you have to adapt to changes. I think it's hard, it's okay when you're 20. But when you're 60 and you're going, "are you kidding me? I have to do this now?" You wonder sometimes about your choices.

Emma Berger 34:48
It's exhausting unless you find that meaning to hold on to in terms of, you know, if you're able to follow your heart in a way and yeah with like writing as you do, just creating, letting yourself have that freedom. Yeah.

Eugene Stickland 35:04
You know it's interesting I married last year, a Filipina, and her experience of life in the Philippines and then she's been in Canada for quite a while, but she knew what I did but she didn't really know how you go about doing it. I think every day she's amazed, like "you have to do that?" or "did you get that grant?"
"No."

"You didn't get that grant but you're famous."

"Yeah I know but I didn't get it."

"Oh so now what are you gonna do?"

"I don't know."

And she gets worried, right?

I say, "don't worry! there's other things. Something will come up, or it won't," and yeah but to her this is like life on a different planet and yeah and she's she had a lot of tension about that and I don't blame her because there's no stability, there's no – it's hard to make long-term plans when you you're always going grant to grant or production to production you don't – there's no guarantees yeah so I hadn't realized really quite how fragile quite often my situation is until I was starting to look at it from her point of view, and I went "yeah this must look really bad."

Emma Berger
No kidding, but yeah, you managed to sort of make a life for yourself and a career and yeah I mean, calling it a career almost sounds like -

Eugene Stickland
Yeah, but it is, it is, right? Yeah

Emma Berger

Yeah, it's like a life devotion, I suppose, which hopefully makes it easier to get by day to day.

Eugene Stickland 36:48
One could say it's a higher calling, for sure. And I think with that higher calling is part of that is to impart the wisdom of the ages to the next generation. I think a lot of us feel that way. I think arts instruction tends to be really good because artists are not secretive about their process and they're always very supportive of anyone stupid enough to do it; I'll help them.

Because I have that attitude, really. But I'm very thorough with that. I say, are you sure? Are you sure? You're bright, you're smart, you've got great marks. You can get into law school, you can get into medical school. Are you sure you want to do this? Yeah. Medicine seems to be the one that you can do both. Chekhov was a doctor and a lot of famous writers were doctors.

And I always say a doctor can go and write a short story, but a short story writer can't go and become a doctor for whatever they get paid. And I think it doesn't steal your soul. I think it reminds you of humanity in the best sense and in every sense, right from birth to death, right? So maybe if I could go back, I would have become a doctor and never practiced, but done that for a university. I don't know.

Emma Berger 38:21
Interesting to think of all the different paths you could take and how you, how you ended up here. Probably on purpose, but it just kind of happened, right?

Eugene Stickland 38:28
Right, yeah. Because everything, I think, if I could go back and I was your age, I'd probably do religious studies and art history. Yeah. But I think when you study English literature, you get all that.

You know, you have to understand the times that a piece was written in, and you have to understand the society it came out of, and that includes the art and the religion and everything else, right?

Emma Berger 38:58
Yeah, kind of like opens you to everything else, it seems like a good base.

Eugene Stickland 39:05
Yeah, I mean when I was studying literature, it was very popular to read works of art from a Freudian point of view. And so you would find phallic symbols everywhere, you know, suppressed sexuality and rage and all these things. And that was fine. That's my professors at the University of Regina were of that school. But I learned a lot about Freud and psychology by being their student, right?

I read the *Interpretation of Dreams* and *Civilization and Its Discontents* and all his famous, well,

not all of them, because he wrote so much that you couldn't, right? And there were also unions and then there were also Marxists and all kinds of different ways that you can approach literature, right? And through that, you get a kind of secondary education. But that's more for interpreting work.

For creating work, I don't know that you need any of that. My greatest mentor was a very famous writer in Toronto named Mavor Moore. He was my mentor at York. And all I would do was once a week I'd go to his office and if you can believe it, this is when you could smoke in any office. And he smoked a pipe.

So most of our time together he'd be loading his pipe, which I liked because my dad smoked a pipe too, right? And he would get it going and the smell of a pipe was really quite beautiful. And we would just talk. We wouldn't talk about plays. We wouldn't talk about anything, really, other than just life.

But his acceptance of me and his belief in me that he showed by not being corrective at all seemed to mean the world to me and gave me the confidence to keep doing what I was doing. It was a very special type of mentorship.

I had a play. One of my plays was done here in Toronto. And he had come here to the mayor's breakfast. He won an award. And I was in the audience and I hadn't seen him for a while. And afterwards I said, hey, Mavor, how are you? And he said, you know that girl in scene four? She doesn't have to say a word. You don't have to give her any dialogue. She's got all the power. He just started in this whole lecture on this play that I'd already written. And I thought, yeah, he can do that too, right? The fact that he didn't even say, I don't even think he said hello.

My girl in scene four – he just started away. But again, I was tremendously flattered and honored that he knew my play that well to give me notes and seeing each other at a celebratory luncheon for him.

Emma Berger
Yeah, that's so fascinating. The influence of people on other people, and I guess that kind of seems to be one of your big things, your big drives. So, is there a way you can maybe try to, I guess, sum up what you would like, your legacy or influence on people to be?

Eugene Stickland 42:38
Hmm. Well, I hope it will be, you know, when I'm at that age where you start thinking about that, right? Well, part of it is to create a body of work. And I think I'm lucky that I came along when I did, because the writers I teach now, since the pandemic, you know, when the pandemic started, whatever the state of the theater was, was like it always is. It's kind of uncertain, hit or miss, artistic directors do programming.

But in my time, what Canadian playwrights were creating was important.

And as Canadians, my colleagues or friends or peers, I guess, and I thought we were consciously creating some aspect of Canadian culture that was expressed through the theater that was just as important as the novels or the visual art or the music or anything else. Going into the pandemic, all that, everything just ground to a halt, right?

And there was one thing that I noticed some theaters did was they decided to renovate because they couldn't open. So they, you know, they still had money in the bank. So they renovate their space or whatever. And coming out of the pandemic, this is my sense, I think I'm right – A lot of theaters were pretty much broke and they hadn't been doing any program and they really had literally lost their audience because if they had them by on the subscription and people just kept coming year after year, that was, that had been broken, right? So they're really starting from scratch to attract an audience, but they weren't going to attract it with a play by any of us.

It would have to be an American play that had had a run on Broadway that they could say, you know, won four Tony Awards or whatever. So to take a chance on a, maybe, you know, I had a play done since the pandemic in Evanston. That was a new play. So I guess I have enough of a name that they got away with that, but for up and coming aspiring younger writers, I don't know how they're going to A, get in, get done period of the way things are. And then like I've written 19 plays that have been produced to have that much of a body of work. I don't know how you would go about doing it. Plus I have novels and poetry and then a quarter of a million words in the Herald.

So aren't I lucky? Timing wise, it's not that I'm any more talented than someone who's 20 years old who's starting out today. I just had more opportunities and I worry. That's what worries me. So what would my legacy be? You see, I don't like to agitate in the theater in case it seems like whining.

What are you doing with Canadian plays? You know, it's like, that's about me. But what I'm really saying is why don't you do more, why don't you develop the work of young Canadian writers?

And I see programs that are kind of geared towards women, geared towards native people, geared towards BIPOC/people of color, but I don't just see something that says, hey, well, the best play that gets written we'll do next year. You know, and if it's cut out from university programming, like I was playwright in good old St. Mary's, right?

Just a little university, but they had me as playwright in residence as few as 10 years ago. I always thought, this is amazing. How are they funding this? Why isn't someone getting fired for having me here? But I felt like it was an important part of the community. And your writers' group at Mount Royal reminded me of the writers group that we had at St. Mary's. And that was, you have faculty advisors. That was my position, too, of sitting in on the meetings.

And I wouldn't really say much, but if they needed anything, I was there for them. But if that's

taken away from the universities and the theaters don't feel that they need to develop new work because they're just going to use old American work, where does a young writer go?

The only thing I can suggest is that, at least in publishing, which has become such a useless, really just stupid endeavor, but it's so easy to self-publish now. There's no reason why everyone can't have a book. And then you sink or swim by the marketplace. If your book is good and people like it, then you'll do well. But at least you have the chance to write it and put it out there. Yeah.

I helped a student of mine publish a book by a little publishing company, but it's really quite similar to self-publishing. It's just that we have a logo and stuff. And we got a beautiful book, and he's a good poet. And unfortunately, we couldn't launch it properly because of the pandemic, but he put some three copies in at Shelf Life Books.

And I said to him the day we did that, I said, those three copies need to sell because then they'll ask for three more, maybe even five more. So I said, you have a brother, you have a mother, you must have friends. You need to get them to come to the store and buy that book. It's 20 dollars. So I was in there three months later, three or four months, as Ijust happened to be in shelf-life.

And I said, by the way, that book that I brought in with the young writer, what's happening with that? Oh, it hasn't sold any copies. And I said, I thought to myself, even his mother didn't buy it? You know, it's like. What do you do?

Yeah, it's a tricky time for young artists. And I wish I had a formula. It's not just money, you know, because money is not going to change the whole world the way it exists right now.

Jaime Espinosa 49:32
Yeah, yeah, truly. You've talked in the past about the ability to improvise, to deal with uncertainty and let's say like a grant is no longer available, and you're in this situation where, well, I don't know, what is my next step? Do you have an experience where you were able to deal with that adversity, with that uncertainty and turn it into something new?

Eugene Stickland 49:58
Let's see, well, you know, the granting agencies are, they're all about, they create a mechanism that they live by and you have to fit into the mechanism, right? There's no two ways around that. But what you can do, I guess, is just hope to jam up that mechanism and make them pay attention to you somehow, you know?

So, for instance, it's not exactly fashionable to be a straight white male of my age these days. That's not the winning lottery ticket for lotteries or anything else, right? So, you know, I could play up my work with Aboriginal girls. It's female, Aboriginal, it's ticking boxes, right? But then at a certain point I think, well, that's not going to do any good. I mean, that's not what I'm writing

about.

I don't want to use that experience to make myself more attractive to funders. And I just say, F it, I'm going to be myself. So here's a play by me, who I am, and this is what the story I'm thinking of is. If you don't like it, fine, but I'm not going to try to pretend to be something that I'm not.

Now, just at the point where I'd ever given up that that would get me anywhere because it doesn't, hasn't much: lately I got a grant to write my new novel. So I thought, aha. Yeah, right. I just, here it is. And I didn't, I'm not celebrating my whiteness or my straightness. I'm just saying this is what I am, you know, take it or leave it. But yeah, and I think that's.

Jaime Espinosa 52:03
That's amazing.

Eugene Stickland 52:04
Well, I mean, straight white males have a lot to apologize for the way the world has been run. And when we see people like the next president of the United States who kind of espouses that whiteness and maleness, it's shameful, right? And we all end up getting tarred with the same, painted with the same brush. And yeah, what can you do? You cannot be like him, right? That's all you can do.

Jaime Espinosa 52:40
Well, when Trump took office in 2016, I remember one of his famous speeches was, well, Mexico doesn't bring the best people into the border. They bring a bunch of bad hombres. [Eugene]: Yeah, drug dealers and prostitutes. [Jaime]: Exactly. I decided to change my username when I play video games to Bad hombre. Bad hombre. Yeah.

Yeah, and to your points, like, I think it's great to hear about diversity and bringing previously unheard voices to the fore. Yeah. And at the same time, it's also helpful to have liberty to question how much or how helpful diversity is versus meritocracy versus, as you said, just being yourself unapologetically. Yeah. Because I can bring the best work, etc.

Eugene Stickland 53:41
Well, you hope to, right? Yeah. Yeah, it's like, I guess maybe through the mentoring, I can mentor anyone I choose, right? And I certainly don't choose, I would never favor someone from a gender or sexuality or a race, I mean, that wouldn't even occur to me. So there's the equality, you know, yeah. But it's interesting in that most of my students are white females, historically. Who knows why? That seems to be the case, yeah.

And I've never had, I've had pretty much everything, I guess. The one thing I wish I got more of, because I'm married to a Filipina, is that I wish I had more, not just immigrants, but children of immigrants who wanted to write.

Because I think, I think I read somewhere, and I can't remember exactly where it was, but the children of immigrants are on, in terms of artistic success, are really on the rise in Canada. So like, Rohinton Mistry, who wrote *A Fine Balance*, is from India, right? His parents are from India, I think he was born here.

I've heard that called, I would agree, that's like in one of the top three novels ever written in Canada, but it happens in India, right? Nelly Furtado, her parents are Portuguese, right? Sean Mendez are– his parents are immigrants, I believe. You can start going through the list, where a lot of very successful, actually even Bryan Adams, because his parents were from England.

So there's this thing about an artist having to stand outside of the culture in order to be able to comment on it. Like, if you're right inside, if your life is like a beer ad, you're never going to step out of that to even notice how good you have it, right? You just assume. Beautiful boys, beautiful girls, beautiful swimming pool, unlimited beer, sunshine always, right? Why would you step outside of that?

Yeah, but what I heard, and I taught immigrants for 12 years, so I'm really aware of their situation when they come to Canada and the difficulties that they face, including my wife. The children of immigrants, they exist in this world, in Canada. The greatest example is they may not speak a lick of English. You put them on an English-speaking playground for about four days and they suddenly have perfect English, no accent, right? Then they go home to their parents, and the parents are speaking to them either in their broken English, because it sucks, because you get to a certain level and it never gets any better, right? This is that plateau.

And the children are listening to their English going, well, they don't want to talk to them in English, but then the parents might go, okay, they're going to speak to them in Urdu, or they're going to speak to them in Spanish. Well, the kid doesn't want to speak that language anymore, because day-to-day reality is English.

So you get this disconnect between parents and their kids, that's part of it. But also, no matter how much that kid integrates into the Canadian playground, a big part of him is still in the old country. The grandparents are there. His family history, all this stuff is there. So where does he belong? And so it's this feeling of displacement, which is, in a way, important for an artist not to belong.

Emma Berger 57:48
It's a really unique way to look at it, I think, because, yeah, any art form involves a lot of, like, different, or taking different ideas and kind of merging them to create something of your own.

Eugene Stickland 58:01
And then challenging norms, because my wife will - she'll look at certain things and she will not understand from her Filipino point of view why we do this in North America. For instance, we've had arguments about dating. She doesn't understand North American dating at all, and so she's

always putting motives on me. If I - you know, I was single for a long, long time before I met her - she'll say, "So you dated this person?"

I'll go, "Yeah, we went out a couple of times."

"So you loved her?"

"No, I didn't love her."

"So you wanted to live with her?"

"No, I didn't want to live with her."

"But you went out with her?"

"Yeah."

"But you didn't love her?"

"No."

"Then why did you go there?"

"I don't know, cuz I was bored. Like, she seemed like a nice person, I went out."

"So what'd you do?"

"We went for a coffee."

And so the other night I was saying, you know, she found some old text. I said, if I invite someone for coffee, that's as innocent and neutral as you can possibly be. Ten in the morning coffee is not romantic. I don't have any designs on that person. If I say “let's meet at Major Tom's for drinks, eight o'clock Friday night,” that's a whole different thing. And she's going, "Why?" And she doesn't get it, right?

So yeah, and so I used to get mad at her for accusing me of behavior that I hadn't had, and now I'm starting to understand - oh, she just doesn't understand.

Yeah, yeah. So all kinds of areas like that. Like, we went to Bruce Springsteen last night. I thought, she doesn't understand the North American experience of growing up in a city like Calgary or Regina that are car cities. You know? Bruce Springsteen is about the automobile, he’s about the road, he’s about the futility and hopelessness of being a male growing up in this broken culture that we live in, this broken society where factories are closing, there's no decent

jobs. And it's... you know, I can't even begin to... like, she liked the music, right?

But - and I haven't, she was working this morning so I guess - the staff just say, "So what's... why is Bruce Springsteen... why were you crying during that one song?"

"That's because he's talking about my life when I'm 18."

"Well, what do you mean? You're not from New Jersey."

“Saskatchewan and New Jersey are a lot more alike than you'd think, right? And Calgary... you were, you know, suburban Calgary too.”

Yeah, anyway, sorry.

Emma Berger 01:00:48
No, it’s an interesting tangent. We could probably talk about what's wrong with cities and cars and everything these days, not just what's wrong, I don't know. It's good to have points where you're able to connect with things like that, I guess.

Eugene Stickland 01:01:03
Well I went 12 years without a car, yeah.

Emma Berger
Interesting.

Jaime Espinosa
In Calgary?

Eugene Stickland
In Calgary! People said it couldn't be done.

Emma Berger 01:01:16
Yeah, everyone says Calgary's a car city yep

Eugene Stickland 01:01:09
I said, well, I've been leasing a car and I got mad at the place, so I took it back and I said, I didn't expect it to go on 12 years. And I totally convinced myself that it's normal to be riding a bike when it's 10 below and snowing.

Emma Berger
It can be if you’re, you’re in that life.

Eugene Stickland

Yup. But then my wife convinced me that we should get a vehicle. So now I have a car. Oh, it's so nice. I got underground parking. It's always warm. I'm wondering now how I did it for 12 years.

Jaime Espinosa
Yeah, I found my wife, she's Japanese, and she came to Canada in 2023 last year. That was the first time I bought a car because

Eugene Stickland
Oh, was it? Well it's if you're a couple you need one

Jaime Espinosa
Exactly

Eugene Stickland
She wasn't going to say let's go to to ride [inaudible] to go grocery shopping – it wasn't – I could tell it wasn't going to work. I'd say look at it, if if you want to go by the river I'll ride my bike there and you walk there and she goes, oh that's stupid

Jaime Espinosa 01:02:15
Oh yeah. We were buying groceries with our backpacks on and with two bikes in the first months then when we got a car, life is better now, right? Yeah, for sure.

Eugene Stickland 01:02:22
Cars are wonderful things. I mean I'm a big fan of cars now but I also look at the environment and think what are we doing to it.

Jaime Espinosa 01:02:33
Yeah, and in that sense, how has Calgary evolved from your perspective? You've been here since 1994.

Eugene Stickland 01:02:43
Yeah. It’s so much bigger.

Emma Berger
Yeah.

Eugene Stickland 01:02:49
When I moved here, because I've lived in Regina, but I've lived in Toronto, too. At that time, Toronto, several million people. And when you had rush hour traffic, you had rush hour traffic, like you were not moving. And so when I moved here, my friend Bob, who I worked with, he said, he's also had lived in Toronto.

He goes, the thing you're going to like about Calgary is it's not rush hour, it's rush minute. And you might wait one red light, you know, for the cars to clear. That would be it. That would be unusual. You'd be home in five minutes, because I think there were 800,000 when I moved here, and now there's 1.2. So think of that.

There's another 400,000 people kicking around, which is twice as big as Regina is, my hometown, right? It's a lot of people and a lot of cars. Yeah. So what I noticed is it's bigger. It's just it's just bigger. I'll go to a suburb that I didn't even know existed. And there's all this stuff out there. And I think, wow, do these people ever come downtown? Probably not. I actually hear that.

I've heard that since the day I was working at the art center. “I don't know. We never go downtown. Yeah. Last time we were there is the 88 Olympics.” You hear that! You know, why don't you go downtown? “Oh, yeah, you got to pay for parking and all those one way streets. Wah wah wah.” So they don't they they live out in wherever and they never come downtown.

Yeah, I guess that's probably – I don't think you need to come downtown so much because I have a friend who moved out to Mahogany, which is like halfway to Lethbridge, right? But I saw this ad on Facebook for Calgary's best jazz bar. And I like jazz music. I said, where was it? Mahogany. And then a little while later, so where's Calgary's best steakhouse? Chairman's. Where's that? Mahogany.

All this stuff in Mahogany. And I'm thinking, why would she possibly drive downtown? You know, she's got everything – and I think Calgary is going to become more like that. The suburbs will become more interesting in and of themselves.

When I moved here, any suburb might have just one little strip mall with a, you know, Tim Hortons and a couple of stores you'd probably never want to go into and maybe not even a grocery store. But now you go out and they have nice coffee shops and they got maybe there's a little bookstore there and maybe there's, you know, art supplies, you know, wow, this is kind of a cool community.

So I think Calgary is going to get more distinct in its neighborhoods. And I think that'll be good for the city. But you got to – you can't just give up on downtown either, you know, because it can be scary down there. And it's just, it's like Regina. There's nobody there.

So we were in New York as my daughter was there. There's a hundred, 200 people on any street corner that you're on and nothing's going to happen. So it's the safest city in America. But when you're on a street and you look up and there's one person on the next block coming towards you and it's dark, you know, who is this one person, you know, I've taken cabs because I don't want to encounter that one person, I'll just run inside and go out of cabs because you never know.

Jaime Espinosa 01:06:22
Calgary can be wild.

Eugene Stickland 01:07:12
Well, that was actually in Regina that I did that, but yeah, no, well, I live in the Beltline and it's, uh, it's really alarming to me what's going on, uh, the homelessness and the drug use, uh, that I see in my neighborhood. Um, and I'm, there doesn't seem to be an answer for homelessness that I could, that I've heard.

Um, we'll get a little enclave in our, um, back alley and about a year ago, I'd be like, why don't they have a house? Why don't they, why did they have to be here where I can see them? But then over the years, so since it's, since it's been bad, I realized, well, if you kick them out from here, they're just going to go the next alley and then you got to kick them out from there.

And so you might be asking the police to make a policy of homelessness well now, what are *they* supposed to do? They don't, you don't want to arrest people or, you know, so that's a mess. And then the opioid drug thing is a mess. There's so many, what, there's deaths every day and that nothings — how do you address that? That they don't seem, no one seems to know.

So now we have these problems that no one can even pretend to know how to address. And when I look at these young people, I think, I've, I've been hired to go into the drop-in center and to the mustard seed to do poetry workshops.

I remember being at the drop-in center and I taught my thing up on the sixth floor, this beautiful boardroom up there, and this guy had written a poem and I said, “oh, that's really good. Like, you got a reference to Shakespeare in here. That's really cool.”

He goes, “oh, thanks.”
“Have you had any education or anything?”
He says, “Yeah, I got a PhD from Waterloo.”
I said “Oh!” Right. What do you know?

So there's a case, you might say, my poetry workshop could help this guy get off the street, give him reason for living. But no, he must have done a hundred courses like mine to get his PhD. So why is he there? I don't know. I don't know the answer to that.

There's that wonderful saying of, what's her name, Anne. You know the bird one, the book One Bird at a Time, Anne Lamott.

It's a book about creative writing. It's really worth reading. I'll just find that, Anne Lamott I think, so I always say that, that you can't do all the birds at once, but you can do them one at a time.

Jaime Espinosa 01:09:24

Mmhmm. Those are wise words.

Eugene Stickland 01:09:26
Yeah, Anne Lammott, One Bird at a Time. It's really a great book, I used to prescribe it for my creative writing classes of people on the book to read. One Bird at a Time, One human being at a time, right? Yeah.

Eugene Stickland 01:09:43
And I'll bet you over the course of your life, Emma, you were asking, if you would change the course of one person's life, you've done something, right? And you don't have to have a class or a university degree to do that. You can just do it because you run into someone in the coffee shop and you take the time to talk to them.

Emma Berger 01:10:05
Exactly

Eugene Stickland 01:10:08
Yeah. If that was our goal, everybody, just one life, help to reclaim one life.

Emma Berger 01:10:16
Yeah, because as you said, there's massive problems that you don't even know where to begin, so yeah I think sometimes it's important to just begin. Just start somewhere just – yeah. Start where you can.

Eugene Stickland 01:10:27
And no one knows. Yeah, and you know sometimes the thing that I find is that someone will say I inspired them. But it wasn't in a lecture, it wasn't in “oh I gotta go for coffee with that person and get them – set them on the right –” not like that at all. Just something I said in passing that they caught on to. Right, and that they held onto and they went home and thought about it and [went], “oh, okay. That's a different way of doing it”. Yeah, and that works for me, right? Yeah.

Emma Berger 01:11:04
That's so interesting.

Eugene Stickland 01:11:07
Yeah, because you never know. And I think that's the thing I've learned too, is whatever stature I have, that people might pay attention to me, is that I have to be careful, always what I say.

You know, I used to be more jokey, and I used to be more irreverent, but I've learned that it's the kind of trust that I have to honor, and because I never know who's listening to what and what they're going to take home with them. Yeah.

Emma Berger

Wise words.

Eugene Stickland 1:11:44
Yeah, well with age comes wisdom apparently, but I'm hoping for that to happen.

Emma Berger 01:11:48
Right. No, I think that's beautiful.

Eugene Stickland 01:11:53
Well, thank you.

Emma Berger 01:11:56
I think it's a good place to end it. We could talk all day. Is there any last thing that you feel like you didn't communicate, that you want to communicate before I cut you off?

Eugene Stickland 01:12:08
Well, can I tell my story about Paul Thompson?

Emma Berger
Sure.

Eugene Stickland 01:12:12
So when I was in Toronto, I just finished my MFA. And we started a little theater company. And we did a very avant-garde, weird, experimental play of mine at a very well-known theater in Toronto called Passe Muraille, which means Through the Walls, Passe Muraille. The artistic director of that company was a man named Paul Thompson.

He's Order of Canada, Governor General Award, a real force in the Canadian theater from about the 60s to the 2000s. He saw my play. And I was waiting for people to hate this play because it was weird and it was out there. And he came up to me in the theater one time and says, “Hey, man,” he's like an old hippie. “Hey, I want to get to know you better. Do you want to go to a movie sometime or something?”

Paul Thompson's inviting me to a movie. I'm like, *Oh, my god.*

I said, “Oh, yeah, sure, Paul. Whatever!” I gave him my number. This is before cell phones or anything, right? No Facebook, nothing. You'd have to [sound effects] phone someone. So I don't know, about a month later, the phone rings. There's no answering machine. You don't know who it's going to be.

“Hey, gee, it's Paul Thompson.” He said, “Do you want to go to this movie?”

I go, “Yeah, Paul, sure!” And I'm feeling totally so unworthy, right? Like, I'm like, oh, my god, hold

on. So then I was broke. I was totally broke. And I had a change purse from Mexico that was one of those leather purses that is filled with dimes and quarters for my laundry. So I put it in my pocket and we'll see what happens. So he's got tickets.

Yay, we get in. He buys the popcorn and the glossettes and the licorice. *Great*. And at the end of the movie, he says, you know, the lights are coming up in the cinema. And he says, “Do you want to go for a beer?”

And I said, “Oh, man, I'd love to, but I got to tell you, I can't afford a beer downtown. It's just not a good time.”

“Don't worry about that. I got money. Let's go.”

I said, “OK!”

So we're going out for a beer. Then he sees two people they all know towards the screen.

He says, “Just a minute, those are friends of ours, I gotta go say hi.”

OK, so I just waited by our aisle. He's talking to these two people. I don't know who they are.

And then he turns, “Come down.” Then he says to them, “Guys, this is a young writer. He's had a play at our theater. He's going to be an important writer in Canada. You're going to hear about him. See, this is Eugene Stickland.” And he said, “Eugene, this is Michael Ondachi. And this is Margaret Atwood.”

I should have just been a cinder then, because my brain had no, you know, these are my heroes. Idols, role models, everything. There, like I'm shaking hands with them. And I'm thinking, I don't see myself as this worthy, but Paul does. So when am I going to buy into Paul's version of myself? [Or] am I going to keep my version where I'm a nobody? Maybe it's time for me to think that I'm better than I think myself, right? That's a huge lesson to learn.

And that's one that I've learned, that I've tried to emulate, if I can introduce somebody to. And not just introduce them. This is some schmuck who had us there. No, this is an important writer. I had the chance in that book I told you about that went to shelf life where even his mother didn't buy it. This young poet for a while was working at Co-op downtown and he would carry out people's shopping to their cars for them.

And I had been shopping there one day and I had my –, and it was pouring rain. And there's this lady who looked quite wealthy, Mount Royal type, and then this poor kid who's doing the grocery, and it's the poet. It's my friend, Jared. And I looked at him, he looked at me, it's raining. It's a horrible day. I looked at her. She's like, and then I said, “Excuse me, ma'am.” She said, “Yes.”

And I said, “I just want you to know that that's one of Canada's finest poets carrying your groceries for you.”

Jaime Espinosa 1:16:53
That's beautiful.

Eugene Stickland 1:16:55
Yeah. Made me feel great. And I thought of Paul in that moment. I thought, this is how you do it. This is what you do. Just one word at a time. Maybe change her opinion of the guy carrying her groceries right now.

Jaime Espinosa
Pay it forward.

Eugene Stickland 1:17:12
Pay it forward, absolutely.

That's my final story. You don't have to use it, but I love telling it.

Emma Berger 01:17:20
No love that, yeah. That's very inspiring, empowering, yeah it's like both people get something from that right like yeah from yeah just talking good of people.

Eugene Stickland 01:18:18
Yeah, I honestly got more from doing it for Jared than I got having it done to me, right? Yeah. Because I was too much in shock that I couldn't deal with it, but I'm sure he'll never forget that moment. And then 10 years later he finished a book of poetry. Did that contribute? Well, it probably didn't hurt, right?

—
Emma Berger 1:17:52
This concluded the end of our interview with Eugene. After that we followed up with thank yous and next steps. Thank *you* for listening!